



## **Fear**

**by Mike Vanderboegh**

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*The fears of man are many. He fears the shadow of death and the closed doors of the future. He is afraid for his friends and for his sons and of the specter of tomorrow. All his life's journey he walks in the lonely corridors of his controlled fears, if he is a man. For only fools will strut, and only cowards dare cringe. — James Warner Bellah, "Spanish Man's Grave" in Reveille, Curtis Publishing, 1947.*

## **Sweet Home, Alabama**

You know, I thank God every day that I am an Alabamian by choice. I love Alabama. I was born in Michigan on a stormy July night in 1952. At the tender age of 3 I was hijacked and removed against my will to Ohio where I was raised amongst the "Heathen Buckeye" as my Michigan relatives saw it (my father took a transfer with the Whirlpool Corporation to their Marion division). From 1955 to 1985, I lived in Ohio, first in Marion, then in Columbus. My son was born in University Hospital there in 1979. In 1985, I "refugeed" out of Ohio, fleeing my ex-wife, the faithless Wicked Witch of the North. I met and married an Arkansas girl who was working in Birmingham and I never went back. In time, Rosey presented me with two daughters, now teenagers. I would like to see them all grow to middle age before I pass over the River Jordan, but that is in God's hands. I am immensely proud of all three of my children. They are my finest accomplishments in life, though I must say that my wife Rosey probably bears more responsibility for that than I do. God has truly blessed me.

And it was here in Alabama where I found most of those blessings, along with a new home that I embraced. In time, the folks 'round here also embraced me but that was a far longer process, as any other "damyankee" can tell you. Right after I moved here, Rosey and I would spend our weekends just driving around, soaking up the geography and the history of the place. I loved the mountains of north Alabama, but I especially loved the people. By and large, the folks here are the best sort of folks you can find anywhere. They are generous, polite to a fault, tough, loyal to kith and kin, hard working, and God fearing. The race relations here are far better than can be found on Columbus' west side, to be sure. True, I came here long after the dogs, the firehoses and the nickname "Bombingham" became uncomfortable memories. But there is one side of Alabamians that I just love, and it is expressed in the state motto: "We Dare Defend Our Rights." I have found more truly free men in Alabama than anywhere else in the country that I have roamed.

From the rednecks of Winston County who still fight personal skirmishes that started back in the Civil War to the veterans of the Deacons for Defense and Justice who took up arms to guard Martin Luther King and other apostles of non-violent resistance from Klan attack, Alabamians exemplify that motto. I am lucky that my mother raised me to never know a stranger, for I've met and become friends with a lot of folks down here who

cross all sorts of racial, ethnic, religious and socio-economic lines. Whenever I get a little peevish at the ways of the world and things seem a little foggy, I return to my friends, especially my Southern white boy friends, for a good mind-clearing dose of down home reality. I've just come back from a visit to the touchstone that represents the best of common sense Alabama, and I can't tell you how refreshed I feel.

You see, I was in a bit of a funk about the reaction to my last essay, Awkward. Andrew Jackson, a natural born fighter and leader of men (and who more southern boys, white and black, were named after than any other until Robert E. Lee came along), once said "Never take counsel of your fears." Heck, that was all most folks seemed to take from Awkward, and my earlier short story Absolved. I couldn't believe it. All I have ever tried to do with my writing is to remind Americans that they once acted like free people and could again, if they but would. Some of my stuff, like "What Good Can a Handgun Do Against an Army?" or "Six Lessons From the 20th Century" have in the past gotten great responses, sometimes years afterward. But for the most part all I got this time was how terrible things are, and how irretrievable the situation is. As I responded on David Codrea's blog War on Guns:

*Well, I'm gratified to see calmness, confidence and optimism breaking out all over in response to my essay. Why don't some of you guys just go ahead and slit your wrists and get it over with? Or better yet, throw some cold water on your faces, wake up and start acting like AMERICANS used to, fer cryin' out loud. No wonder the ATF thinks they can get away with what they do. If you'll stop worrying about what the enemy can do to you and start thinking about what you can do to them, you'll have made a start at winning the fight. Crap, you outnumber them a hundred to one, despite your fears. If you acted like you had the power that you actually have — the power that your own timidity is stripping you of — we wouldn't have to fight at all! Sheesh. Quit moaning, b-tching and "woe-is-me-ing" and start ACTING like free people. You're sure you wanted this blog and not the "surrender before inconvenience" one?*

#### **"Only Cowards Dare Cringe"**

But you know, I messed up. I should have been reading my own stuff. For example, this from You Can't Repeal the Law of Unintended Consequences last April:

*I have found over the years that modern day so-called liberals (who bear little resemblance intellectually to their claimed classical liberal ancestors) lack the courage of their convictions. There is no principle so dear that they are willing to personally suffer for, let alone die for. Government, blessed government, is their idol. If they are aggrieved, oppressed, or merely imagine that they are oppressed, it is to government that they turn. There hasn't been a liberal willing to die for his principles since the Civil Rights movement. They are more than willing to dispatch the men and women of government to die in their place, however. But, and I think this is more dangerous to the country, they also extrapolate from their own cowardice and believe that all people (even those who disagree with them) will, in the end, do what they're told by Government. (Emphasis supplied.)*

Stupid me, I should have realized two things. First, it is not only liberals who can extrapolate from their own cowardice. And second, the folks who were responding to my writing negatively are not representative of the people I expect to "get" my stuff anyway. I use the medium at hand to broadcast my message, the Founders' message, forgetting that the folks who will best understand it are not tuned in. In a "blinding flash of the obvious" to use John Wesley Rawles' phrase, here is what I finally figured out: most rednecks (and most gunnies) are not keyboard commandos. They do not sit in the dark trying to make sense of the electron-borne winds of modern information (or disinformation). They are too busy with the exigencies of life to trade intellectualisms on the Net. The folks I'm talking about (and those I'm trying to reach) are rather more like the Kentuckians that Hank Messick described in the forward to his book King's Mountain: "One thing about the fellows back home — when they say they're going to kill somebody, they kill him."

And so I went to talk to some friends, and some friends of friends, about the issues I'd raised in the last few pieces I'd written to see how despondent and discouraged they were about events. These were Alabama boys,

rednecks (some of them) and the sons of rednecks — gunnies all — the great-great-grandsons of the yeoman farmers who followed Andrew Jackson in the Creek War and Stonewall Jackson in the Shenandoah. Most have lived lives of physical work and service — to their God, their country and their families. Some are not particularly church-going men, but they live a faith that puts some pew-sitters in the shade. Whatever they've gotten in this life, they've had to work and sometimes fight for. Nobody gave it to them. They are men, in the best sense of that term. Like James Warner Bellah's cavalrymen, they understand what he meant by "only cowards dare cringe." These are folks who live by a code enunciated in Grantland Rice's poem, *On Down the Road*, (though I doubt some of them would ever admit to having read a poem):

*Hold to the course, though the storms are about you;  
Stick to the road where the banner still flies;  
Fate and his legions are ready to rout you—  
Give 'em both barrels—and aim for their eyes.  
Life's not a rose bed, a dream or a bubble,  
A living in clover beneath cloudless skies;  
And Fate hates a fighter who's looking for trouble,  
So give 'im both barrels—and shoot for the eyes.*

*Fame never comes to the loafers and sitters,  
Life's full of knots in a shifting disguise;  
Fate only picks on the cowards and quitters,  
So give 'em both barrels—and aim for the eyes.*

They are quiet fellows, mostly. But it is not the smartest thing in the world to make them mad, as British Colonel Patrick Ferguson found out when he called their ancestors in North Carolina "backwater men," "barbarians" and "mongrels" in 1780. He miscalculated his audience. The Scotch Irish pioneers came down out of the "backwaters," tracked Ferguson and his Tories to King's Mountain and killed him in a fight that proved THE turning point of the Revolution. One of my friends, a maintenance man at a local nursing home, a humble fellow who never went to college, a son of a coal miner and the descendant of men who fought Ferguson (and others who fought the Creeks, Abe Lincoln AND Jefferson Davis, and the Kaiser and Hitler and Hirohito) can tell you the story as if it happened yesterday with a comprehensive knowledge of the subject and an eye for detail that would put a professional historian to shame. One of the defeatist critics of Awkward headlined his piece "the revolution has been canceled." Try telling that to my friend. It lives within his soul. As another great Southerner once said, "The past isn't dead. It isn't even past."

I guess my sense of history is one thing that helped me make the transition from "damyankee" to full fledged Alabamian (with an asterisk, of course). Still, there may be another more mundane reason that I was embraced. As I was telling David Codrea the other day, I never considered myself a leader (and still don't consider myself a good leader) but it happened that during the early 90s when the predatory Clintonistas were roaming about seeking whom they would devour, I ended up leading one of our local constitutional militias. I didn't expect it or ask for it, it just happened. It was just that as I went along people followed me, even into situations where our lives were at risk. Knowing how suspicious and downright allergic the boys were about anything "Yankee" one day I made the mistake of asking, "Why did you fellows pick me?" And from the back of the room somebody said, "Hell, Mike, yer a Yankee. We put you out front and if you get it, we ain't lost much." Pretty funny — funny AND smart.

### **"The Cutting Edge"**

But southern boys like these — call them hillbillies, call them rednecks — have, as Hank Messick observed, always been "the cutting edge" in America's wars. Messick quotes the Georgia historian F.N. Boney: "There is no shortage of rednecks in the neat, quiet American military cemeteries which now dot the globe. However rejected in normal times, the redneck has always been welcomed when the nation went to war."

And “rejected in normal times” is no idle phrase. Is there any other class of people more lampooned and vilified than the Southern Christian poor white boy? Like the long-dead Ferguson, the elites of this country have always despised him. As Messick says, “Because he remains an individualist, he is a safe target.” “Hillbillies,” as Messick calls them, are “not interested in the fast buck. Wealth has never appealed to him as an end in itself. If he expects a reward for hard work, he assumes it will come in heaven. He still practices the Protestant Ethic, you see. More important to him than money is his personal freedom, the right to do something or nothing as he pleases.” (Hank Messick, *King’s Mountain*, Little Brown, 1976, pp. 10-11).

So like I said, I went and talked to my good old boy buddies. I talked about the situation we find ourselves in today, with Heller looming and the Olofson case outrages that demonstrated the rule of law no longer obtains. I read them, or let them read, some of what I had written. Finally, I read them passages from my defeatist critics’ postings. All of their reactions, long and short, were summed up by one of them: “Heck, Mike, why are you worried about what a bunch of pissant Yankee wusses think? You still got us.” And so I do, God bless ’em all. I’ve got “the cutting edge” with me. With that and God, I’ll make my stand, as the song says, to live and die in Dixie.

### **“What is the opposite of fear?”**

*Although extraordinary valor was displayed by the entire corps of Spartans and Thespians, yet bravest of all was declared the Spartan Dienekes. It is said that on the eve of battle, he was told by a native of Trachis that the Persian archers were so numerous that, when they fired their volleys, the mass of arrows blocked out the sun. Dienekes, however, quite undaunted by this prospect, remarked with a laugh, “Good. Then we’ll have our battle in the shade.” — Herodotus, *The Histories*.*

And that brings me to my final point. Discouragement and defeatism come from isolation and the fear that it breeds. In *Gates of Fire* by Steven Pressfield, the Spartan Dienekes says:

*“All my life . . . one question has haunted me. What is the opposite of fear? . . . To call it aphobia, fearlessness, is without meaning. This is just a name, thesis expressed as antithesis. To call the opposite of fear fearlessness is to say nothing. I want to know its true obverse, as day of night and heaven of earth. . . How does one conquer fear of death, that most primordial of terrors, which resides in our very blood, as in all life, beasts as well as men? . . . Dogs in a pack find courage to take on a lion. Each hound knows his place. He fears the dog ranked above and feeds off the fear of the dog below. Fear conquers fear. This is how we Spartans do it, counterpoising to fear of death a greater fear: that of dishonor. Of exclusion from the pack. . . But is that courage? Is not acting out of fear of dishonor still, in essence, acting out of fear?” Alexandros asked (Dienekes) what he was seeking. “Something nobler. A higher form of the mystery. Pure. Infallible. . . You young men imagine that we veterans, with our long experience of war, have mastered fear. But we feel it as keenly as you. More keenly, for we have more intimate experience of it. Fear lives within us twenty-four hours a day, in our sinews and our bones. . . We cobble our courage together on the spot, of rags and remnants . . . I know all the tricks . . . I know how to close with my man, how to convince myself that his terror is greater than my own. Perhaps it is. I employ care for the men-at-arms serving beneath me and seek to forget my own fear in concern for their survival. But it’s always there. The closest I’ve come is to act despite terror. But that’s not it either. Not the kind of courage I’m talking about. Nor is beast-like fury or panic-spawned self-preservation. These are katelepsis, possession. A rat owns as much of them as a man.”. . . Ariston asked if this higher courage in fact existed. “It is no phantom,” Dienekes declared with conviction. “I have seen it. . . Do you know who owns it, this pure form of courage, more than any other I have ever known?” No one around the fire answered. “My wife.”*

In Pressfield’s novel, the answer to Dienekes’ question was wrapped up in the secret of how the 300 were chosen for what all knew was certain death at Thermopylae. I will not ruin the ending of the book for you if you have not read it, but I think I can summarize and answer without danger: Love. Love is the opposite of fear. Love, faith, duty. If you take counsel of your fears, if you believe in something so little that you can be discouraged before even trying to defend it, then I say boldly that you do not love it enough. You do not have

faith in what you profess to believe. For this lack of love, you shirk your duty — to yourself, your family and your country. The wonder of it to me is that you feel comfortable in telling the world of your own failure to love, of your lack of faith and your pitiful excuses for why you cannot do your duty without apparent embarrassment.

The men and women of Alabama that I know and love, the despised rednecks, crackers and hillbillies, may not know everything in the wider world but they know what they love — of God and mankind — and are willing to die for it. They walk the corridors of their controlled fear, because they are men and women — American men and women. They are Americans who the Founders would be proud to know, as I am proud to know them and count them friends. And what, I ask, does that make the cynics and defeatists among us who claim to believe in the Republic the Founders made while making excuses why they cannot fight for it?

My good friend called them “a bunch of pissant Yankee wusses.”

I'm not going to argue the point.

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